

VZCZCXRO9133
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #2478/01 2351416
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231416Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1026
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 002478

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: AFGHAN ELECTIONS: PRELIMINARY OBSERVER GROUP
READOUTS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Numerous observer groups released preliminary reports on the transparency and fairness of the Afghan elections. There were universal concerns among the groups about the accuracy of the voter registry; the intimidation of voters, candidates, campaign workers, and election officials, especially females; the lack of security which severely affected the voter turn out in the south and southeast of the country; the quality of the candidate vetting process; the late establishment of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC); the misuse of government resources; and the bias of media coverage which favored a powerful handful of candidates.

¶2. (SBU) However, on the positive end, all observer groups praised the fact that these elections were carried off at all given the current security environment; that there was excellent coordination among Afghan Security Forces that prevented some attacks and curtailed others; the emergence of widely-covered national presidential debates on issues; that voting operations and the distribution of election materials were so highly successful; and that the legal framework for elections in Afghanistan and the protection of women's rights is already in place. End Summary.

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FEFA - Domestic Observers
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¶3. (SBU) The Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), the country's home-grown observer coalition, sent 7,368 observers to all provinces in Afghanistan, but not to all districts. The number of observers it was able to send to insecure areas was significantly lower than the numbers in relatively secure areas. Security also impacted the number of female observers sent out. For example, there were no female observers in Paktia, arguably the most conservative province and the most prone to female voter registration card fraud. In Zabul, there were only five female observers.

¶4. (SBU) FEFA held a press conference on August 22 to report that security was a problem, echoing the message of other observer organizations. FEFA noted that some of its female observers were attacked in Kunduz, Logar, and Kabul. FEFA calculated that 650 female polling stations throughout the country could not open, although they did not elaborate on the reasons for this situation; it was likely either lack of female staff or lack of security in the area or both. FEFA also reported that 1500 polling centers opened late, although they did not expand on the reasons for the delays, whether there were any geographic or security distribution patterns, or what the impact was on voting. There was at least one report of a FEFA observer in Kandahar actually witnessing the Taliban cutting off voters' fingers.

¶5. (SBU) FEFA claimed that it had witnessed incidences of fraud including: support of candidates by IEC staff, closure of polling stations before 1600, illegal campaigning of some candidates on election day, stuffing of ballot boxes by the representatives of some powerful candidates, underage voting,

and multiple voting. In some cases, FEFA reported, its representatives saw people with boxes of voter registration cards; they claimed that this was seen nationwide, not just in the South, where it had been expected. In a meeting with Ambassador Holbrooke, the Chair of FEFA specified that his organization's allegations of ballot stuffing were specific to parts of Balkh, Kandahar, Laghman, and Takhar. On a more hopeful note for future elections, FEFA's Chair told Ambassador Holbrooke that he believed the lower voter turn-out in the South was due to voter intimidation, not apathy. The full text of FEFA's report is available at <http://fefafa.org.af>.

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Asian Network for Free Elections
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¶16. (SBU) The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) deployed 55 observers to 13 provinces. On August 23 it released a list of recommended changes to be made for future Afghan elections, an analysis of the existing legal framework for elections and women's enfranchisement in Afghanistan, and a press statement with statements at both ends of the spectrum. While stating that "there is no denying the fact that the elections were by and large acceptable", they also said that "in some areas, peoples' participation was restricted to a great extent by the prevailing security situation." It also describe in much stronger language than any other team the problems with ink that we have heard anecdotal reports about. ANFREL said that "in many polling stations, the quality of indelible ink that was used was of extremely poor quality....Many voters demonstrated how the

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ink could be wiped off within a few minutes after the polling process." Embassy Kabul will wait for further reports to come in before we assess whether or not we agree with this characterization. The full text of ANFREL's report is available at www.anfrel.org.

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European Union Election Observation Mission
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¶17. (SBU) The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) put a generally positive spin on the elections at its press conference on August 22. General Phillipe Morillon called the election "mostly good and fair" based on their observations in 17 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and 342 polling centers out of 6,192. (Comment: Morillon stipulated that this would allow for a statistically strong sample of Afghanistan's polling centers, but given the diversity of polling day experiences being reported by others it seems impossible to get an accurate aggregate picture without a complete view of the whole. End Comment.) The EUEOM did not present any data on turn-out and nor any analytical reports of fraud or fraud patterns.

¶18. (SBU) Despite the relative optimism of the EUEOM press conference, its written report reflects the same concerns and trends noted by other international observers. Highlights of the EUEOM report that were not noted in other observer reports were alleged incidents of the IEC Commission exerting pressure on its staff "in a manner which raised questions about its impartiality." The EUEOM also directly cited the Electoral Media Commission for failing to ensure fair and balanced coverage of the election campaign by not preventing the skew of the media toward only four presidential candidates and most especially the incumbent. The full text of EUEOM's report is available at www.eueom-afghanistan.org.

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Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe
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¶19. (SBU) The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and

Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) fielded an experts mission rather than an observation mission. Their plan has been to release an after-action report with a set of recommendations for future elections several weeks after these elections are concluded. On August 22 they reported in Washington to a small group on their initial observations. They drew their conclusions from official statements of the government, specific information from GIROA officials, and their own small observation team's visits to 40 polling sites in Kabul City on election day. Their current conclusions track with all of the general conclusions of the observer groups discussed here. The text of OSCE/ODIHR,s report is not yet available online.

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International Republican Institute
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¶10. (SBU) The International Republican Institute (IRI) released a preliminary report on August 22, calling the day of the elections "credible" but clarifying that this was not a comment on the on-going counting and complaint adjudication process. With regard to Election Day itself, IRI said that it saw generally well-run, well-organized polling sites, based on 69 observers who visited 250 polling stations. It is unclear how representative their observations are, and their report does not describe the locations of the polling stations they observed. IRI noted that the main issues were low turnout, abuse of state resources, and fraud but their report was among the least detailed. The full text of IRI,s report is available at www.iri.org.

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Democracy International
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¶11. (SBU) Democracy International (DI) chose to release a written statement on August 23 rather than hold a press conference. They visited 13 of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan. The title of the statement is: "Too early to judge if Afghanistan election is credible." DI took a middle of the road approach giving positive and negative elements of election day equal time. Their comments tracked with the general comments of all other observers but they differed by making the most unequivocal statement yet released about how the fairness of the elections cannot yet be assessed.

¶12. (SBU) DI made a very pointed statement on the inability of any group to assess the percentage of Afghans who voted

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since there is no accurate list of registered voters and no census of Afghans in general. DI made clear that all groups will only be able to report on the total number of people who voted and called this "the only meaningful measure of turnout."

¶13. (SBU) DI was also the only observer group to comment on the IEC's decision to withhold the vote count until August 25, calling it "unfortunate" on the grounds that it destabilizes the already uncertain political atmosphere. DI would have preferred that the IEC release partial results with a clear explanation that they were partial. (Comment: This could actually destabilize a tenuous security environment since most Afghans will take any IEC declaration as definitive, regardless of how it is caveated. End Comment.) The full text of DI,s report is available at <http://democracyinternational.com/afghanistan> .

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National Democratic Institute
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¶14. (SBU) The report by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is measured and detailed. NDI highlighted the fact that their observers saw different elections based on the

region of the country from where they were reporting. The elections proceeded relatively normally in the north, west, and central regions but there were reports of violence and disenfranchisement in the south and southeast. NDI was straightforward in admitting that they could not assess the truth of the majority of these allegations as they did not have a strong presence in the south or southeast due to security concerns.

¶15. (SBU) NDI reported definitively on the fact that there was violence and threats of violence against voters and election workers by the Taliban and other armed groups. According to NDI this did not appear to be systemic, but it was heaviest in the south and southeast. NDI reported also that in many provinces polling centers were closed early, or did not open at all due to threats of violence and, that while local election officials seemed generally knowledgeable about counting procedures, female staffers seemed slightly less well-trained in some provinces than in others. Many female polling centers postponed the counting procedure until the following day to prevent their staffs from being out late at night. This was a culturally acceptable alternative to having female poll workers turn over counting responsibilities to their male counterparts.

¶16. (SBU) Turnout was lower than expected in Kabul Province and nationwide, according to NDI's report. NDI acknowledged that this was the case despite the IEC's afternoon issuance of an order to keep polls open an extra hour in some areas to encourage additional turn-out. NDI's report admitted that they did not know whether this was due to the message not getting out or due to apathy or fear of violence.

¶17. (SBU) Regardless of why that message did not affect its intended recipients, the IEC messages to poll workers seemed, to NDI, to be absorbed efficiently. When hole-punches didn't work, the IEC told its local structures that workers could cut the corners off cards instead. U.S. Embassy observers witnessed this adjustment first-hand as far away as Herat. NDI also reported positively on ink usage and the fact that there were fewer incidences of proxy voting and multiple voting cards than expected, calling the latter "isolated cases."

¶18. (SBU) The NDI report concentrated more on women's obstacles to candidacy, voter turnout, and poll station work than any other we have seen. NDI's report noted that female voter turnout was noticeably low, except in Bamyan and the north. Especially in the south and southeast, where it was very hard to recruit female poll workers, the presence of men in female centers may have posed a big deterrent for the participation of women voters. (Comment: Poloff observing in Herat Province noted that all women wearing burkas pushed them up and were completely uncovered in front once they entered the polling stations. They would not be able to do this in male-staffed polling stations and trying to deal with the hard-to-decipher ballots through a burka would make voting significantly more difficult, especially if a female voter is illiterate. Female polling station workers are an extremely important issue for all future elections. End comment.) NDI presented an assessment of the pluses and minuses of the election along with a long list of lessons learned and recommendations in today's report. At their press conference, NDI was again the most measured, saying that they are reserving judgment for now on whether or not the elections were free and fair until the entire electoral

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process is over. The full text of NDI's report is available at www.ndi.org.
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